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ABSTRACT

Vocational Adjustment Coordinators (VAC's) are counselors employed in a cooperative program between the Minneapolis Public Schools and the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The program provides rehabilitation services to physically, mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally handicapped students. This study was conducted to obtain opinions about and recommendations for the VAC program from school personnel who had used these services. Questionnaires were distributed by guidance department chairmen in secondary schools. The return rate was 92%, but a number of respondents had never made referrals. These responses were analyzed separately. Of the users, 97% had made referrals this year. Regular weekly visits by the VAC were the most usual method of contact, and most people found him easily accessible when needed. Only about 1/3 of the respondents thought all handicapped students who should be getting help were getting it. Students response was thought to be positive, and there was general agreement with the vocational plans worked out by the VAC. Feedback was a problem for some. It was recommended that better information about eligibility requirements be provided at both junior and senior high levels, that feedback be improved after a student's rehabilitation program has been implemented, that referral be simplified, that students and parents be better informed, and that instructions for screening be given to all school personnel. (Author/KM)

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Minneapolis Public Schools

Reactions to the Minneapolis Vocational Adjustment Coordinators' Program March 1972

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May 1972

Research and Evaluation Department
Educational Services Division

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Minneapolis Public Schools

Reactions to the Minneapolis
Vocational Adjustment Coordinators' Program
March 1972

Summary

Vocational Adjustment Coordinators (VAC's) are counselors employed in a cooperative program between the Minneapolis Public Schools and the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This program is offered by the school district's special education department to provide rehabilitation services to physically, mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally handicapped students. See page 1

The purpose of this study was to obtain opinions about and recommendations for the VAC program from school personnel who had used these services. pages 1-2

Guidance department chairmen in all secondary schools were requested to give questionnaires concerning the VAC program to those school personnel who "most frequently referred students" to the VAC. Eighty-five of the 92 people who were requested to complete a questionnaire did so for a return rate of 92 percent. page 2

Despite instructions that only program "users" receive questionnaires, about three out of ten respondents said they had never made referrals to a VAC. Their responses were treated separately. It appeared that a disproportionate number of these respondents were from junior high schools. pages 3, 13

Of those who had used VAC services at some time, 97 percent had made referrals this year. Regular weekly visits by the VAC provided the most usual method of contact, and most people found him easily accessible when he was needed. Only about one-third of the respondents thought all handicapped students who should be getting help were getting it. pages 3 - 8

Student response to the program was thought to be positive. General agreement with the vocational plans worked out by the VAC was indicated, but feedback was a problem for about one in five. This sample overwhelmingly recommended that the VAC program be continued. page 9

It was recommended that better information about eligibility requirements be provided at both junior and senior high levels, that feedback be improved after a student's rehabilitation program has been implemented, that the referral process be simplified, that students and parents be better informed about the program, and that instructions about screening for eligible students be given to all school personnel. pages 14 - 15

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Minneapolis Public Schools

Reactions to the Minneapolis Vocational Adjustment Coordinators' Program March 1972

Vocational Adjustment Coordinators (VAC's) are counselors employed in a cooperative program between the Minneapolis Public Schools and the State of Minnesota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This program provides rehabilitation services to physically, mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally handicapped students before they leave school in order to assist them in their transition from school to work. Services available to students include medical and psychological evaluations, work evaluation and work adjustment training, academic or skill training and on-the-job training, and vocational counseling, job placement and follow-up.

VAC's are hired by the school district as part of its special educational program. They function as rehabilitation counselors with authority to use DVR funds to obtain services for eligible handicapped students. The Minneapolis Public Schools currently employ five VAC's to serve the student population between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. However, because of manpower limitations, the effort has so far been focussed mainly at the senior high level. Regular visits are made to the senior high schools, but services for junior high students can be requested on an individual basis.

Any school staff member can make referrals directly to a VAC, but typically, students with problems are referred to the school guidance counselor, social worker or school nurse and they in turn refer the students to the appropriate agency.

Purpose of the Study

This study was done at the request of the Minneapolis Public Schools' Special Education Department. The purpose was to obtain opinions about and

recommendations for the VAC program from referring school personnel. No attempt was made to evaluate overall program effectiveness.

Sample

On February 29, 1972 all secondary schools' guidance department chairmen were sent a "packet" of questionnaires concerning the VAC program. A cover letter requested that they give the questionnaires to "five members of your school's staff who, in your opinion, most frequently make referrals to the VAC." The chairmen also were asked to return to the research department a list of names of those people who had received the questionnaire. Responses were obtained from guidance department chairmen from all fifteen junior high and twelve senior high schools in the district. Four junior high guidance chairmen said their school had never used the service and one asked for extra questionnaires. Eighty-five of the ninety-two people who were requested to complete a questionnaire did so for a return rate of ninety-two percent. Although questionnaires were anonymous, respondents each mailed in separate cards indicating they had returned a questionnaire. This procedure let us know who had completed the questionnaire without identifying the respondent so we could then send reminders to nonrespondents to insure a representative response.

Table 1

Number of Questionnaires Returned

Senior High Schools		Junior High Schools	
Central	5	Anthony	2
Edison	5	Bryant	0
Henry	5	Folwell	0
Marshall-U.	3	Franklin	5
North	4	Jefferson	2
Roosevelt	5	Jordan	1
South	5	Lincoln	0
Southwest	0	Nokomis	6
Washburn	5	Northeast	4
West	4	Olson	4
Vocational	4	Phillips	5
WOC	4	Ramsey	3
	49	Sanford	1
		Sheridan	1
		Southwest	0
			34

Combined total=85 (two respondents not identified by school)

Respondents were initially divided into three groups: (1) guidance counselors, (2) social workers and school health personnel, and (3) administrators, teachers and special education personnel. Since no significant differences were found in the responses of these three groups, all questionnaires were pooled.

About seven out of ten respondents indicated they had made referrals to a VAC at some time, and unless otherwise indicated, this report is based on their answers and comments.

Table 2

Positions Held by Respondents

	Total Sample		Respondents Who Made Referrals	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Guidance Counselors	46	54	30	52
Social Workers and Health Personnel	25	29	20	34
Other	14	17	8	14
Totals	85	100	58	100

Twenty-seven of the eighty-five respondents indicated they had never made referrals to a VAC. This subgroup was analyzed separately. Their responses will be discussed at the end of this report.

Results

Ninety-seven percent of the 58 respondents who had made referrals to a VAC at some time, had made referrals during the 1971-72 school year (through February). The number of referrals made ranged from zero to thirty-six. Only two people had not made referrals.

It is estimated that, on the average, each respondent had made about nine referrals, but this estimate may be a conservative one. A number of

respondents indicated they had made "many" or "a lot" of referrals, but since a specific number was not mentioned their responses could not be used to calculate the average. Two respondents indicated that the VAC reviewed all seniors in their schools.

Table 4

How Many Referrals Have You Made to the VAC During This School Year

Number	Percent
0	3
1-5	40
6-10	16
11-15	10
16-20	5
21-25	5
26+	5
Don't know/ no answer	16
	100

Contacts

Regular weekly visits by the VAC provided the most usual method of contact with school personnel. Of those respondents indicating they did not receive regular visits, about half added comments such as "No VAC assigned" or "Visits if needed." Three-fourths of the respondents thought the VAC's visits were "frequent enough", but in some schools, even weekly visits weren't enough.

All respondents knew how to contact the VAC assigned to their schools for assistance and almost all, about ninety-five percent, said the VAC could be reached most of the time or always.

Table 5

Can You Reach the VAC When You Need Help?

Response	Number	Percent
Most of the time	55	95
Sometimes	1	2
Rarely or never	0	0
Don't know/ no answer	2	3
Total	58	100

Table 6

Do You Receive Regular Visits From the VAC Assigned to Your School?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	47	81
No	10	17
Don't know/ no answer	1	2
Total	58	100

Table 7

Are the VAC's Visits to Your School Frequent Enough?

Response	Number	Percent
No, too infrequent	4	8
Barely adequate	2	3
Yes, frequent enough	44	76
Dont' know/ no answer	8	13
Total	58	100

Familiarity with the Program

All but two people indicated they were familiar with all aspects of the program, or, at least, generally knew what it was supposed to accomplish and how to use it. In addition, all but two people knew the VAC assigned to their school, and those two said they didn't have a VAC assigned. (In fact, all senior high schools have a VAC assigned, and the feeder junior high schools use the VAC assigned to their respective senior high schools).

Responses to the question, "Do you view the VAC as part of the school staff?" were divided evenly, with a large number describing him as a "resource person" rather than a staff member.

Table 8

How Well Informed Do You Feel About the VAC Program?

Response	Number	Percent
Familiar with all aspects of the program	16	28
Generally know what it's supposed to accomplish and how to use it	40	69
Just know that it exists	2	3
Don't really know anything about it	0	0
Total	58	100

Table 9

Do You Know the VAC Assigned to Your School?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	56	97
No	2	3
Total	58	100

Table 10

Do You View the VAC as a Part of the School Staff?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	28	48
No	26	45
Don't know/ no answer	4	7
Total	58	100

Students Served

About one-third of the respondents apparently thought all handicapped students who should be getting help were getting help. However, another third thought more students needed help. The remainder didn't know. Some of the reasons given for this apparent lack of help were: needy students hadn't been identified by school personnel, the counselors were overworked, the VAC's were overworked, there was too much red tape and paper work, students and parents rejected help when it was offered, and the students were too young to qualify. Many respondents thought the program was not available in junior high schools, and many senior high personnel only referred students who were quitting and seniors who needed vocational counseling and placement.

Table 11

Are There Handicapped Students in Your School Not Now Receiving Help Who Should Be?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	21	36
No	20	35
Don't know/ no answer	17	29
Total	58	100

In response to the question "How many students in your school do you think could benefit from the services offered by the VAC?", over sixty percent either didn't answer the question or said they didn't know. There was much variability among those who did make an estimate with responses ranging from less than one percent to over fifty percent.

Table 12

How Many Students in Your School Do You Think Could Benefit From the Services Offered by the VAC?

Response	Number	Percent
Less than 5%	8	14
6 - 10%	5	9
11 - 15	2	3
16 - 20	2	3
21 - 25	1	2
26 - 30	2	3
31 - 35	1	2
More than 50	1	2
Don't know/ no answer	36	62
Total	58	100%

Slightly over one-third of the respondents said the VAC worked well with students with <u>any</u> handicap, but one-third thought the VAC was best suited to serve a particular kind of student. The most frequently mentioned students were the mentally retarded, the physically handicapped, and students with emotional problems.

Table 13

Is There a Particular Kind of Student That the VAC Seems Best Suited to Help, For Example, Emotionally Disturbed, Mentally Retarded, Epileptic, Students With Minor Vocational Handicaps, etc?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	20	35
No	21	36
Don't know/ no answer	17	29
Total	58	100

No strong negative reactions to the program were reported. Almost sixty percent said the students seen by the VAC seemed to have a very positive reaction to the program. A few respondents indicated students' attitudes might start out as indifferent but they got more and more positive as they became involved in the program. Three out of ten either didn't answer the question or said they didn't know how the students felt. One guidance counselor stated students' attitudes were positive only if "...the preparation for acceptance has been prepared by the counselor. Otherwise the students need time to recognize the need." A special education teacher said "It varies greatly from student to student. Probably the greatest factor affecting this is the parents' attitude toward accepting help for the student." Several others indicated they seldom got any feedback from the student or from the VAC once a referral had been made.

Table 14

What Kind of Reaction Do the Students Seen by the VAC Seem to Express Toward the Program?

Response	Number	Percent
Very negative	0	0
Indifferent	7	12
Very positive	33	57
Don't know/ no answer	18	31
Total	58	100

Coordination

Vocational plans designed by the VAC were viewed positively by school personnel. Almost eighty percent of the school personnel making referrals were in agreement with the voc nal plans worked out by the VAC. No one disagreed! The other twenty percent either didn't answer the question or said they didn't know.

About two-thirds of the people responding indicated they worked with the VAC in planning vocational programs for the students they referred, but the other third indicated that for the most part they just referred students and the VAC took it from there.

Almost fifty percent said they got entirely satisfactory feedback on the VAC's activities with their students once they had been referred, but again, nearly twenty percent said they got almost no feedback. About two-thirds thought the VAC followed through on his plans well so the students could take advantage of the DVR's services, but over one-third said they didn't know whether he followed through or not. Only one person thought the VAC didn't follow through.

Table 15

Have You Generally Been in Agreement With the Vocational Plans Worked Out for Students by the VAC?

Response	Number	Percent
Almost always	26	45
Usually	19	33
Not usually	0	0
Almost never	0	0
Don't know, no answer	13	22
Total	58	100

Table 16

Do You Work With the VAC in Planning Vocational Programs for Students You Have Referred?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	36	62
No	18	31
Don't know/ no answer	4	7
Total	58	100

Table 17

Do You Receive Sufficient Feedback on the VAC's Activities With Your Students Once They Have Been Referred?

Response	Number	Percent
Almost no feedback	10	17
Some, but not enough feedback	14	24
Barely adequate feedback	3	5
Entirely satisfactory feedback	27	47
Don't know/ no answer	4	7
Total	58	100

Table 18

Does the VAC Follow Through on His Plans so That the Students Take Advantage of the Services Offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	37	64
No	1	2
Don't know/ no answer	20	34
Total	58	100

Evaluation

Three-fourths saw the VAC as a "very effective" resource for their students, another one-fifth said he was "some help", and no one indicated that the VAC program was "almost useless" to them.

Table 19

Do You View the VAC as a Positive Resource for Students Within Your School?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes, very effective	42	72
Some help	11	19
No, almost useless	0	0
Don't know, no answer	5	9
Total	58	100

Should the VAC services be continued? Definitely--as far as this sample of school personnel is concerned. In response to the question "Do you recommend that the VAC continue to provide services in your school?" everyone answered "yes" with four exceptions: One person said "Would like to get service", another said "Would like to have it and intend to talk to VAC people" and two people did not answer the question. Here are some illustrative comments from the people who answered Yes:

- Without their help and resources, we would be seriously handicapped in helping many students make future plans.
- We would like to have extended time and service
- Very important this be maintained.
- Absolutely. I would protest if his services were to be withdrawn.
- Should be in all secondary education.
- Without reservation the answer is yes-could use additional help for the students with drug related problems.

- The VAC is very valuable.
- I see this as a contact they can keep and use after out of school.
- Keep up the good work--it's much appreciated by our students and staff.
- Evaluation and counseling received is just as valuable as the financial assistance they provide. My counseling would be seriously hampered without this referral source. It makes a big difference.

Respondents Not Making Referrals to VAC's

Twenty-seven people in the total sample of eighty-five said they had never made referrals to a VAC. The original letter to the guidance department chairmen had requested they give the questionnaires to those staff members who "in your opinion, most frequently make referrals to the VAC." Twenty of these people said they had never even heard of the program. Four others had been informed about the program within the last two months, and even they were not sure what services were available. Here are some typical comments volunteered by this subgroup:

- Send someone out to tell us about VAC!
- I would like to know more about the program.
- This is a new program to me. Believe it could be valuable. Would like to know more about it.
- Let the junior highs know what it's all about.
- We have a great number of kids who could be helped, I think.
- Start some service.
- Initiate visits to schools.
- Would like VAC to contact schools frequently so that services are better known to personnel.
- Visit school--alert staff--involve guidance.
- Explicit examples of services available--which are applicable to junior high students.

Even though school identification was not requested, forty percent of this subsample voluntarily indicated they were from junior high schools. Although there was no way to find out how many others in this particular group might also have been junior high staff, it appears that a disproportionate number of school personnel not using VAC services are in junior high schools. Even though VAC services are available for students aged fourteen and over, it seems that many school personnel believe the minimum age requirement is sixteen. Thus, overall results which include junior high respondents tend to underestimate the use of VAC services in the high schools and overestimate their use in junior high schools.

Recommendations

- Get more information to the junior high schools. Fourteen and fifteen year olds, although they are too young to use the job placement services, could benefit from evaluations not available through regular school services (for example, more extensive medical and psychiatric assessments).
- Improve feedback to referring personnel after the selected program has been implemented--and after graduation.

Sometimes a voluntary comment takes on added impact because of the emphasis or conviction it expresses. When a statement like this is repeated by a second, third, or fourth person its influence may be stronger than would seem warranted by a count of the absolute number of people voicing this concern. These last three recommendations are based on such "evidence."

- Get information about what this program has to offer to parents and to students--possibly through curriculum development. It was also suggested that the VAC's increase their contacts with the home.

- Try to speed up the paper work and cut down on the red tape. Several respondents indicated that the rather burdensome referral process discourages the parents of many students who have been referred. Quicker decisions on eligibility would also be a big help.
- Provide more information to help the school personnel at all levels in screening or looking for eligible students.

Conclusions

The VAC program appears to be working well for those people who use it. To them the program provides a valuable resource.

The evidence is not so clear that the program is reaching as many students as it should. Although questionnaires were distributed to those school personnel who "most frequently make referrals to the VAC", almost one-third said they had never made a referral. Five schools returned no questionnaires. In another five, (all junior highs) two or fewer referrals had been made.

It is clear that information on eligibility for VAC services needs wider distribution, particulary for junior high school personnel. High school personnel need to be informed on the non-job aspects of the program.